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SECOND DISTRICT, GEORGIA

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**Congress of the United States**

**House of Representatives**

**Washington, DC 20515**

August 1, 2018

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The Honorable Mike Conaway  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, and Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1305 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, and Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairmen Conaway and Roberts and Ranking Members Peterson and Stabenow:

I am writing to express my support for a strong, robust farm bill that values conservation, invests in rural development, provides certainty to our farmers and ranchers, and adequately funds our food and nutrition programs. As the Ranking Member on the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, which is ultimately responsible for funding many of the programs authorized in this legislation, I understand the challenges of balancing these competing priorities. It is critical that this process garners input and support from a bipartisan coalition and produces a farm bill that can pass both chambers of Congress. Below are my priorities:

- **Conservation:** I do not support the drastic cuts to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) in the House bill. The CSP is the nation's largest working lands conservation program that awards farmers grants to address soil health, water quality and other environmental issues on their land. The CSP's voluntary programs allow farmers and ranchers to improve grazing conditions and improve crop yields to help them thrive and stay competitive. Strong conservation programs will ensure our farmers are prosperous for generations to come.
- **Rural Development:** The final bill must make rural development a priority. There is a huge disconnect between the level of economic prosperity and opportunity available in urban areas versus rural areas. Congress must make it easier for rural communities to gain access to capital for infrastructure and economic development. This includes rural broadband. While both bills invest in rural broadband, I support the House's effort to include an additional \$350 million for grants in rural broadband, electric infrastructure, and telecommunications infrastructure programs. This also includes rural water and

sewer infrastructure. While I was pleased both bill increased the Rural Water and Wastewater Circuit Rider Program to \$25 million, I am opposed to excessive fees and reduced funding to Rural Water and Wastewater Facility Grants that will make it more difficult for rural communities to receive the support they need.

Additionally, I do not support attempts to zero-out such programs as the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program and the Value Added Producer Grants Programs as proposed in the House bill. Both programs encourage the growth of rural farms and businesses and are critical for rural prosperity. I also cannot support the House's language that defunds the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). I strongly support the Senate's language that more than doubles REAP funding to \$50 million for each fiscal year between 2019 and 2023.

However, I urge you to exclude the Senate's language that makes changes to the cushion of credit program. The cushion of credit program allows entities that borrow money from the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), such as electric cooperatives, to make voluntary deposits into an account that accrues interest and can only be used to repay debts. This provides greater certainty to the federal government that loans will be repaid and offers rural communities affordable electricity. Changes to the program and its current interest rate will ultimately be felt by consumers who will see an increase in their monthly rates.

- **Safety Net for Farmers:** The current Senate version includes \$18 million for 2017 blueberry and peach losses due to extreme cold. I strongly urge the inclusion of this provision in the final bill and support the highest possible funding. Strong safety net programs and being responsive to farmers' needs are staples of all farm bills. As commodity prices continue to fall it is important that farmers are able to effectively manage their risks. At the same time, Congress also has a responsibility to act when the unexpected happens.

I also urge the adoption of three House provisions over their counterparts in the Senate. First, I support the House's language to maintain an Adjusted Gross Income limit of \$900,000, and oppose the Senate's effort to reduce it to \$700,000. Second, I oppose the overly restrictive definition of and requirements to be considered "actively engaged in farming." The House bill continues current law on 'actively engaged' and expands it to included extended family members. Third, I support the House provision that assists U.S. textile industries by increasing the Economic Adjustment Assistance Program rate to 3.15 cents per pound, compared to the Senate's language which is only 3 cents.

- **1890 Land-Grant Universities and Historically Black Colleges and Universities:** Now more than ever we must support agriculture research done by institutions of higher education, particularly at 1890 Land-Grant Universities and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). These institutions are struggling with deferred maintenance of their research facilities as well as funding disparities. I urge you to provide funding streams that would positively impact their agricultural research.

I urge you to include funding for the grant program that awards scholarships to students at 1890 Land-Grant institutions. The average age of farmers and producers in the US is



60 years of age. These scholarships will help increase the number of young African-American individuals seeking a career in the food and agricultural sciences.

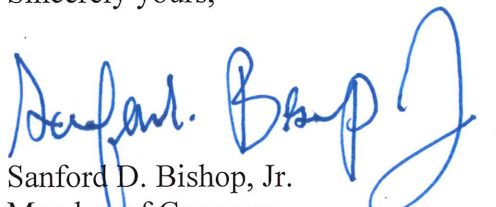
- **Trade:** As trade uncertainties continue to grow, the agricultural industry is bearing some of the worst consequences. This legislation offers Congress an opportunity to unequivocally stand with our farmers, ranches, and producers. I support increasing funding for programs that help create, maintain, and strengthen export markets such as the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Cooperator Program. I also support the establishment of the export assistance program for specialty crops to help address the unique export challenges these crops face. It is critical that this committee, and Congress as a whole, takes decisive action to provide immediate relief in any way possible to our producers during current and future trade wars.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** Finally, while I agree that we need to cut fraud, waste, and abuse, the drastic cuts and changes to SNAP in the House bill are unacceptable. SNAP is widely considered an efficient and successful safety net that offers desperately needed support to those in need. I strongly support the Senate's bipartisan language that improves SNAP's program integrity and operations, invests in pilot programs to better understand job training programs, and most importantly rejects strict work requirements that would kick deserving people, especially kids, veterans, and senior citizens, out of the program. Any reform that would shame those that receive SNAP benefits or limit the ability of vulnerable citizens to receive the nutrition they need to survive must be excluded.

The committee must also address hunger within the military. In 2013, 23,000 active duty service members relied on SNAP benefits. And in a recent survey of military personnel, about 15 percent of those surveyed, responded, "Yes" to experiencing food insecurity. To address this issue, the committee should adopt a provision to exclude the Basic Allowance for Housing Allotment from soldiers' income calculation. This would allow more service members the opportunity to enroll in SNAP.

We must do everything in our power to ensure the current bill does not lapse. I came to Congress to use the political process to improve the quality of life for the people of the 2nd Congressional District of Georgia and all humankind. The farm bill is a piece of legislation that provides certainty and hope to millions of people. I am confident Congress can come together and pass a comprehensive farm bill that meets the challenges our nation faces today.

With warmest personal regards, I remain

Sincerely yours,



Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.  
Member of Congress